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THE FRENCH EXHIBIT OF PICTURES AT THE PARIS EXHIBITION

AMONG nearly two thousand pictures, distributed through twenty-one galleries, it is very difficult to arrive at general conclusions, intelligible and reliable. Yet there can be little doubt that more attention is paid to portraits and figure-compositions than to landscapes. For one reason, the latter are crowded out by the enormous size of a large number of the figure subjects. In the struggle to gain notice at the yearly exhibition, and having gained it to hold it, the painter relies upon surface display and startling motion; upon what, in French parlance, will give a shock to the emotions. In this hurly-burly of sensation the still smaller voice of landscape has but a poor chance of being heard, so the landscapes, also, allow themselves occasionally to be betrayed into the device of large canvases, which in proportion to their size lose in intimacy and subtlety of expression. And even where they resist the temptation, they seem to succumb to the dulling influence of popular indifference. There are very few examples, in the vast array, of landscapes really beautiful by virtue of keen analysis, skillfully synthetized; of minute and delicate insight, expressed in sensitively truthful rendering of atmosphere and in choice adjustment of values. The work is either perfunctory or else its sincerity is displayed in arousing emotion, not through fidelity to nature, but by artifices contrived in the studio.

Cazin, for example, in a showing of eight pictures, comes very near to being perfunctory. One recognizes his effects as having been studied direct from nature; but also that these pictures recall others of his that one has seen, until the suspicion is borne in that he has mastered a series of effects and reproduces them more or less mechanically. At first he

is an uneven painter, and here appears as somewhat of a skillful mannerist. Not one of these pictures is a revelation, giving one a vivid insight into some phase of nature; they carry us very little, if any, further than our own observations would have done. Others with whom I have talked feel the same thing, and it is just as well to state it, for there is a tendency amongst collectors in America to regard Cazin as an undisputed master, whose pictures are likely to increase in value. As a matter of fact, his reputation is largely due to the paucity of Frenchmen who are maintaining the grand traditions of landscape painting, which, by the way—and the fact cannot be too often or too stoutly declared—is being better done to-day by our American landscape painters than those of any other country, excepting only Monet and Fritz Thaulow. By this I do not mean that they are reproducing the methods of the masters of the past; but they are imitating their spirit of keen and patient research, living with nature and getting closer to her. Outside of the pictures of the two men mentioned above, you must look in the American section for the best examples of marine and landscape, admitting at the same time that, good as the showing is, it represents only inadequately our true position in landscape painting.

Perhaps the Frenchman who comes nearest to what our own painters have taught us to esteem is Pointchin, with a series of desolate sweeps of country in the high Juras, overtopped by far-reaching skies. The ground is solid, established firmly on its anatomy of rock, and the sky is serene and tender, charged with atmosphere. They are solemn, almost stern in expression, but so real. Compare them with the landscapes of Vayson, who is regarded over here quite highly. His are thin, superficial, and apparently cooked at home, or, if not, manufactured on the spot by a recipe acquired. On the other hand, much

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more convincing work is shown by Emile Barau, Georges Callot and René Billotte. The latter's is particularly fascinating. He makes a happy choice of subject and gives to each an individuality of feeling, though inclined to an excess of detail, which somewhat mars the impressiveness. But he is not concerned, apparently, with putting sentiment into his pictures, being satisfied to paint a changing scene from an objective standpoint. Douchez, on the contrary, invests his subject with an intensity of feeling, in these examples, grim and stern, and reaches his effects by vigorous synthesis.

Julian Dupré, who for a long time painted under the conscious influence of his father, in four landscapes with cattle shows that he has found himself. He paints now more flatly, and with fewer brushes, placing his lights and shadows in blocks, if I may so express it, most effectively and with every suggestion that he saw the scene exactly so. This quality of setting a thing on canvas actually and vividly as it impressed the painter is not sufficiently appreciated in America. Collectors educate themselves to see nature through the eyes of some one painter, or group of painters, until they have no eyes themselves for any expression of nature which deviates from what has become their formula. They lose the ability to detect the truth in a freshly individual point of view, which is one of the reasons that makes them overlook the merits of our own painters.

A very pleasant painter of the clearly-lighted landscape of southern France is Gagliardini; Guillemet gives the facts rather than the spirit of the scene, and there is much charm of tranquillity and luminousness in the work of Armand Guéry. A far stronger painter is Albert Gosselin, who gives more attention to the vibration of light and air than do the majority of French landscapists; while Hoopignies, the veteran, still holds one's interest by the impressiveness of his canvases, though by comparison with the qualities of light and atmosphere and values of color, for which modern men are seeking, they seem old-fashioned, lacking, moreover, the redeeming quality of poetic feeling. Other names which should be mentioned are: Pierre Lagarde, a very individual painter of glowing scenes; Ernest Quost, Mosté, a tonalist in subdued colors, and

Menard, who strives more for emotional suggestion than truth to nature. Excellent harbor scenes are shown by Le Gout-Gérard and Chevalier, while Roll paints a bull or pony with convincing skill, but treats his landscape backgrounds in quite perfunctory fashion.

To see French landscape at its best one must visit the galleries reserved for the Centennial Exhibition, where in a room, associated with work by Renoir, are a number of examples by Monet and Alfred Lisle. In their brilliant realization of the subtle moods of nature, her freshness, varying light, and sense of separateness from city life and studio tradition, these pictures are supreme, and the opportunity of seeing so many together draws renewed attention to the freedom of these men from any mannerism, to the absolutely fresh eye which they bring to each subject. If the greatness of an artist, in any medium, consists in summing up in advance and giving fullest expression to the scattered tendencies of his time, then Monet, especially, in the art of modern landscape, must be regarded as the greatest.

An excellent feature of the hanging in the French section is that each artist's pictures are as far as possible grouped together, so that they can be studied with much more ease and profit. Groups which single themselves out are those of Lhermitte, Dognan-Bouveret, Roybet, Vollon, Eugene Carrière, Besnard Bévaud, Boutet de Monvel, Raffaelli, Jules Breton, Gabriel Ferrier, Geoffroy, Hebert, Heuner, Lerolle, Henri Martin, Prinnet, Sautai, Simon, Veber and Rochegrosse.

In his scenes of peasant life Lhermitte shows himself almost as skilled in landscape as in the treatment of the figure. His themes are mostly of labor or of rest from it; full of rugged strength and sterling sentiment, in which brawn and muscle are dignified, and there is scarcely a trace of that sentimental pity for the peasant because he has to labor. In one or two of the pictures browns and greys predominate, giving a certain sombreness; but elsewhere there is golden sunshine or cool, fresh light. There are two interiors, and one of them is that remarkable picture, "The Friend of the Humble," in which the Christ is making His presence known to a party of peasants at their meal, as he did to the two disciples at Emmaus, and the scene is treated with such skillful control that no anomaly is felt.

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This is not the case in Bévaud's "Magdalene in the House of the Pharisee," in which a lady in modern evening costume is prostrated at the feet of Christ, who sits at the head of a dinner table, just as the coffee is being served, while the guests, all men, standing or sitting, watch with various expressions of interest, amusement or contempt. How the anomaly is drawn home with ruthless sarcasm; the artist has wished it to be understood that Christ's presence in the scene is altogether a solecism. In another picture, "The Descent from the Cross," humble folks are tenderly caring for the dead Christ, while, turning his back upon them and standing on the edge of the hill, a blue-bloused workman shakes his fist in wrath at the smoking factories in the city down below. The introduction of the dead Christ, either upon the cross or not, is a not infrequent device in the French pictures; but, for the most part, it is like the use of the Deity's name to give emphasis to conversation, lacking in good taste, and, by repetition, even in emphasis. Heuner, however, has used the theme reverently enough, but one likes him better in his subjects of nudes, shown against dark velvety backgrounds of foliage, and very much, also, in his portraits, as direct and simple as the others are elaborately artificial. But throughout, his work is of a distinguished artistic quality, rich in color and pervaded with a nice poetic feeling.

With Dognan-Bouveret the use of sacred themes is more than usually sincere. He really tries to reproduce the spirit of the Bible story and in no slight measure succeeds. The example here is "The Last Supper," in which the twelve are seated along one side and the two extended ends of a table in a vaulted chamber, Christ standing in the centre, the source of a warm yellow glow, which lights up the watching faces. Above the central mass of light is the Savior's face; thus isolated from the rest of the throng, a device that largely conduces to the elevated impression of the picture. In remarkable contrast, both as regards color and feeling, is "The Breton Women at the Pardon," so direct and forcible in its arrangement of green grass, black costumes and white caps. But, perhaps, the most artistic picture that he shows here is "The Conscripts," a handful of men in blue blouses marching through the street, headed by a drummer and a boy

carrying the tricolor, in the folds of which he is partially enveloped. The movement of the figures is very fine, the suggestion of the occasion vigorous and healthy, and the color and composition extremely well devised. In this last respect there is some disposition here to criticise unfavorably his latest picture, "Consolatrix Afflictorum," which belongs to Mr. Frick, of Pittsburgh, the owner also of "The Supper at Emmaus." The color is primarily a scheme of green and the composition is arranged as a diagram of lines and masses. The Virgin sits in the centre, the edges of her voluminous cloak descending almost similarly on each side in sweeping curves. Sheltered under it on the right is a fawn, and opposite kneels prostrate a man's figure. Higher up in the picture, behind the Virgin's seat, are three angels; two seen in profile, one full face, their wings forming a balanced pattern. Their drapery is faintly blue against the green of a sunset forest background. As to the composition: The artist's intent even seems to have been to treat it strictly conventionally, so that it might conform to the undisguised symbolism of the theme. He was not painting a subject, but a thought. As to the color, your liking it or not will depend upon your color-temperament; it affects me most enjoyably, the limpidity, purity and tenderness of the scheme conveying the sentiment most intelligibly and acceptably.

While on the subject of color, let us swing our attention to an entirely different painter, Antoine Vollon, the most superb colorist in the French section, whose treatment of textures in still life, so as to lend emotional value as well as literalness to his subject is unsurpassed. As every one probably knows, the artists call him "The Painters' Painter," so masterful is his handling of the brush, and another oft-quoted remark is that he has lifted still-life to the highest ranks in painting. His examples here show that his power is undiminished; they are, perhaps, the most esthetically beautiful things in all the galleries. Bail is another very fine painter of still-life in connection with figures, but he has not the same magnificent range of color, nor does he compose his pictures so synthetically as the older artist.

Besnard's skill in movement, color and light are shown in several pictures, notably in a "Spanish Dancer," upon a stage, and in the

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picture of a singer at whose feet a bunch of roses has just been thrown, and who turns her head with a quick movement to acknowledge, while a draught of wind sweeps back her silk skirt and shows the outline of her figure. Among several portraits is one of Mr. Clark, of Montana, very precisely attired in fashionable clothes, a portrait so completely without any subtlety that one would not have recognized it as being by Besnard. A painter who uses rich low-toned colors with excellent effect, lights his pictures most artistically and is very strong in characterization, is Lucius Simon. Before his pictures one finds oneself in the presence of an exceptionally strong painter, whose style is as conspicuous as his sincerity. Very skillful in lighting, but with a palette almost limited to brown and grey, Eugene Carrière, however much one may feel him to be a pronounced mannerist, commands one's interest and respect. He smothers his pictures in atmosphere, through which the figures faintly loom, heads and hands alone having any sort of definiteness, and the expression on the faces being, as a rule, painfully careworn. It is the skillful lighting that saves his pictures.

Next to mention two men, who have practically obliterated light and shade from their pictures: Boutet de Monvel and, in his portraits at any rate, Raffaelli. Their work, even to these identical pictures, has been so recently seen in America, that there is no occasion to comment upon it here. But, personally, I should like some day to see the former's mural painting, "Joan of Arc at Chinon," set up in the church for which it is destined, since in the conventional lighting of an ordinary gallery very little understanding can be reached of the artist's point of view, much less of how far he has succeeded. A painter of large canvases, very flat in treatment, with little modeling, is Henri Martin. His subjects are of allegorical or symbolic character, such as "To each his own Chimera," "The Apparition of Clémence Isawre to the Troubadors," "Serenity," and "Towards the Abyss." Perhaps the most artistic is "Serenity," grass sward, slim trees and draped figures, some resting or in contemplation, others floating through the air with music. There are traces of the influence of Puvis de Chavannes, though in the coloring, the application of the pigment in separate hues and in the manner of lighting this artist is entirely different, and the result he obtains is thoroughly individual. The conception of serenity in its beauty, unalloyed by any sternness, is most vividly and charmingly expressed. In the picture of the Abyss a note of tragic cynicism is struck. A laughing damsel, thinly veiled in black, leads on a throng of men and women, many of them nude, some kneeling, others

straining to get nearer, all exhibiting feverish, impotent eagerness. The progress is down the shadowed slopes of a mountain, on the top of which is sunlight, and a flock of black birds of prey hover above the throng. It is mightily impressive, and one admires the artistic control displayed in the arrangement. It is different with so many of the French painters; if they get hold of a terrible subject they treat it in all its crudity of horror. There is Veber, for example, with a cluster of half naked cripples struggling for a coin in the gutter. The path is down hill and they have made a rush for the spot and are in a tangled heap of limbs, tearing and clutching at each other with frightful expressions of hate and greed, blood freely flowing. It is horrible! And there are many other pictures of this character; even one which represents starving wretches tearing flesh from a corpse! The painter is Tattegrain. Rochegrosse shows a subject of the "Murder of the Boy Emperor Geta," a most realistic scene, saved artistically, however, by the fine use he has made of red costumes and drapery, contrasted with the swarthy limbs and leather cuirasses of the soldiers. But after some of these scenes of blood and lust it is quite a relief to turn to the work of a painter who has no ambition beyond creating an artistic subject out of homely material. There is Prinnet, for example, with girls dancing in a dim-lighted parlor, a group of children running downstairs to play, a couple playing back-gammon, and so on; but to every subject by clever lighting, delicate values, or suggestion of movement, he has given a distinct and charmingly artistic individuality.

On the other hand, Roybet sets out to paint a picture that shall be imposing, and succeeds. He has one of "Charles the Rash at Nesles," veritably as big as the front of a house and crowded with figures; but one can discover him better in a smaller, though still large, picture, "The Hot Hand," a scene of coarse hilarity in a tavern, centering round a robust woman, whose blousy face is afire with merriment. There is such animation and suppleness in the movement, strength and control in the color, and admirable rendering of textures, that one loses sight of the subject in the enjoyment of its treatment. Still, I like him better in the rich low tones and sober dignity of smaller canvases, such as "The Astronomer" and "The Geographer," and possibly best of all is a portrait of Mlle. Romani. She wears a black velvet cloak, finely differentiated from the dark background; and spotting this dark mass is a crown of golden-red hair, a pale face with large black eyes, the two hands holding together the edges of the cloak and leaving just a rippling line of the white dress beneath it.

The concluding notes of the French exhibit must be held over until the next issue, in which the pictures of other countries will be discussed.